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ABSTRACT

The influence of culture on the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher, student, and curriculum is examined. The assumption is that if acknowledgement is given to: (1) the influence of culture; and (2) ways that cultural assumptions of teachers and students differ, then adjustments can be made that permit a more rewarding and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. American cultural values and their classroom implications are addressed, such as competition, confrontation, and cooperation. Valued behavior in the ESL classroom is noted, including that related to independence and individual work, turn-taking, group work, deadlines, and question asking. A brief discussion on how to facilitate the cultural adjustment of ESL students is also included. Contains 18 references. (Author/LB)

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Some Effects of Culture in the ESL Classrozom and their Implications for Teaching

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The influence of culture on the ESL teacher, student, and curriculum is examined. The assumption is that if we acknowledge the influence that culture has on us and make the effort to understand how the cultural assumptions of teachers and students differ, we can make adjustments that permit a more rewarding and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. American cultural values and their classroom implications are addressed. A brief discussion on how to facilitate the cultural adjustment of ESL students is also presented.

Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) agree that one can not teach English without teaching culture. Since language is part of culture, teaching the language itself teaches something of the culture. And since the teacher as a native speaker is a product of the culture, she is teaching about her culture unconsciously through her language, her demeanor, and her non-verbal behavior as well as through the methods she may choose for teaching.* In these ways the students are being exposed to the culture covertly. The teacher may not be aware of the cultural teaching that is going on in the classroom.

On the other hand, it is also possible to discuss culture overtly and to consciously teach students about the culture in which they are now immersed. Wilga Rivers recommends, in fact, that the language teacher choose to do this. She feels that in order for a student to have a complete understanding of the meaning of language a strong bond between culture and language must be maintained. She also considers that the differences in values and attitudes between cultures may be one of the main sources of problems in language learning (Rivers, 1968).

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the effects of culture in the ESL classroom. The teacher, as a cultural being in the classroom, has an effect on her students and if she is unaware of this effect, she will have no control over what influence this has on the class. Understanding the cultural values and assump-

* In order to avoid confusion in the use of pronouns, throughout this paper the pronoun *she* will be used to refer to the teacher and the pronoun *he* will be used to refer to the student.

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tions teachers have as products of their culture will enable the teacher to make conscious decisions as to how, to a certain extent, culture is affecting the classroom.

Students in an ESL class are also cultural beings, and as such, exhibit behaviors and express values that the teacher might not understand. This also could cause difficulties for the teacher and the students. Knowing some of the ways students' behavior may differ from teachers' expectations will also be beneficial to the teacher and may enable her teaching to be more effective.

As these students experience the new culture in which they must now function they go through different phases of adjustment. One phase, a period of frustration caused by having to deal with all the unfamiliar cues of the new culture, has been termed culture shock. During the time students are experiencing culture shock they may not be open to learning about the new culture and may for various reasons resist acquiring the target language. Culture shock is usually followed by a period of cultural adjustment. Helping students to make the transition from culture shock to cultural adjustment may be facilitated through discussions about cross-cultural differences and specific discussions about different aspects of American culture.

Teachers have noticed that some second language learners seem to acquire the language more easily than others. When good language learners have been studied to discover the characteristics responsible for the ease with which they acquire the language, the results have suggested that these learners have a positive attitude toward the new culture and want to participate in it in order to use the second language as soon as possible. By facilitating a student's understanding of the target culture, the teacher may be decreasing the student's feeling of frustration with the new culture and increasing his confidence in dealing with it. This new confidence then encourages participation in the new culture and, therefore, helps him improve his English more quickly.

Although there are many ways to define culture, the definition of culture that best conveys the meaning of the concept as discussed in this paper is from L. Robert Kohls (1979):

> *Culture = an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society. Culture refers to the total way of life of particular groups of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does, and makes - its customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation.*

One particularly good thing about this definition of culture is that culture is conceptualized as a system, a total way of life. This concept is important because in order to understand the significance of culture in the classroom, it is necessary to understand that culture is extremely complex and underlies every-

thing we do or say, even in a setting that some would normally think of as devoid of culture: a classroom.

THE TEACHER AS A CULTURAL BEING

The definition of culture used in this paper indicates that everything a person says, does, or thinks is dependent upon that person's culture. Culture can be seen, then, as a giant bubble surrounding an individual who sees and evaluates and acts according to how reality is perceived through this bubble. Every social being has been raised in a culture that filters reality and helps guide the individual through life.

When an ESL teacher enters the classroom, this cultural filter enters with her and affects not only how she perceives the actions of the students in the class but also how she herself behaves in the class: her language, her actions, and even the subtleties of non-verbal behavior of which she is most likely unaware.

For a person who has never had experiences outside of her own culture, it would be particularly difficult to be aware of the cultural filter which is such an integral part of her life. It would just appear to the person that this is the way the world works. A saying that expresses this idea quite well is: "The fish is the last to discover the water." You do not know you are in water if it totally surrounds you and it is all you have ever known. In particular, the ESL teacher who has never had a cross-cultural experience, who has never travelled and lived in another country, may be unaware of herself as a cultural being and be unaware of how her demeanor and actions are culture-bound. Even an ESL teacher who has had some experience in dealing with other cultures may not be aware of the values and assumptions she holds as a product of American culture. It is valuable for a teacher to learn about her own culture and to discover as much as possible about how her cultural filter affects her teaching.

It has been said that the best way to learn about your culture is by being immersed in another, but unfortunately not all people who are teaching ESL have had the opportunity to live in another country before they begin teaching here in the U.S. So what can a teacher do to become more aware of her cultural "baggage" without leaving the country? L. Robert Kohls, in his book *Survival Kit for Overseas Living* (1979) gives exercises that help people become more aware of the values held by most Americans.

Kohls has developed an interesting way for an American to discover the common values that are held by most Americans. Rather than sitting down and trying to list them, which might be a difficult and not very fruitful task, Kohls suggests making a list of common American proverbs and then writing down in one or two words which value each one conveys. Some examples he gives are "Time is money," which teaches time thriftiness; "A penny saved is a penny earned," which teaches thriftiness, and "Waste not, want not," which teaches frugality (Kohls, 1979).

When trying to discover American values, two proverbs may be found that seem to be contradictory, such as "Might makes right" and "It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game." The first values power over morality and the other emphasizes sportsmanship over victory. Apparent paradoxes like these should not cause the teacher too much concern because culture is such a complex system that often times some values will contradict each other. In his book *American Cultural Patterns* (1972), Edward C. Stewart examines the cultural values and assumptions that we, as Americans, hold. Stewart gives the examples of "equality" seeming to be in conflict with "achievement" and also with "freedom." He claims it is the overall integration of all values that form a culture that is particularly American.

It is also interesting to compare American proverbs with those of other countries. In the United States there is a proverb "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." It could be said that the value underlying this proverb is assertiveness. But in Japan there is a proverb that says, "The nail that sticks up gets hit." This shows the value of conformity and the security found in not standing out. An ESL teacher interested in discovering more about her own cultural values as well as those of others could collect proverbs from students and then compare them with American sayings to reveal the similarities and differences between her values and those of her students.

Another way to begin thinking about American values is to read what others have to say about them and see if one agrees. Stewart, in his examination of many American values and assumptions, discusses some that might be particularly important for an ESL teacher (Stewart, 1972). A teacher who is not conscious of differences in cultural values may assume that such things as cooperation, sources of motivation, and even the sense of competition are similar across cultures, and therefore she would design classes based on these assumptions. Furthermore, cultural values vary in degree of importance across cultures. In order to understand the implications of value-laden classroom settings and instructional lessons, one must examine the particular dimensions of the culture in order to identify areas of potential culture conflict. Certain values will have strong influence on the nature of the classroom experience and must be examined carefully.

AMERICAN CULTURAL VALUES—CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS

Below is a discussion of some major American cultural values that may have an effect on the ESL classroom. Each value will be related to the general context of American culture and then specifically to the ESL instructional setting. While cultural values vary from individual to individual within a culture, the values presented below are discussed as culture-wide traits in contrast to traits exhibited by any given individual.

Competition.

Competition is seen in the U.S. as a very powerful method of motivating people. Some even see competition as the basic emphasis of American society. Americans, who are quite achievement-oriented and independent, seem to respond well to it (Stewart, 1972). Students who have been raised in the American educational system have learned how to compete academically and have been raised playing competitive sports and competitive games, both at home and in school.

In some cultures, though, the desire to allow someone to save face is stronger than the desire to compete. For example, in Laotian and Vietnamese culture, the strong sense of affiliation with family and community can outweigh the desire to win at another's expense (Stewart, 1972).

With this understanding, the ESL teacher would be wise to consider her students before she develops a competitive game to test some part of the material presented in the class, a strategy which works well with Americans. Latin American students, for example, are not used to being singled out for praise, so a competitive task where there was one winner may make the Latin American student feel uncomfortable and may cause the student to be unwilling to participate in the exercise (Jaramillo, 1973). In some classes I have taught, the students in an otherwise relatively well-behaved class, have had a difficult time obeying the rules of a competitive game. It may have been that some of them were not familiar with the use of competition in the classroom and did not know how to behave in this new learning situation. Although it would not be beneficial for the students if the teacher avoided exercises that used competition, since the students would lose an opportunity to experience a part of the American educational system, the teacher should be aware that the idea of competition in class may be new for some, and she should prepare her lessons accordingly. One suggestion might be to begin with some mildly competitive tasks, such as information sorting exercises done against the clock, and build to more competitive ones, such as modified game shows like Jeopardy, as students become more familiar with the concept.

Confrontation.

When Americans are faced with a problem, they often like to confront it directly. If the problem is with another person, the American will often choose to confront that person directly. For example, in American classrooms, it is not uncommon for students to approach a teacher to express dissatisfaction with the class. In some other cultures an individual who has a problem with someone might prefer to have a third party intervene and act as a go-between. Direct confrontation is avoided as much as possible. (Stewart, 1972).

In the ESL classroom a student who is having trouble in a class may elect to have a relative or close friend speak to the teacher instead of doing it himself. This may be the explanation of why a student who thought she was placed too low in an ESL class brought a spokesperson with her when she went to see the

director to request a class change. The director was curious about the value of the spokesperson because her English was not as good as the student who wanted to be moved up. Perhaps she brought her not as an interpreter but rather as the go-between who could prevent the need to confront the administrator directly. If a student brings a family member or friend to the teacher's office to discuss problems the student may be having in class, it may be because the student is trying to behave in a socially appropriate way. The teacher should not judge the student as being cowardly or timid.

Cooperation.

It may appear at first that due to an emphasis on competition, cooperation would not be highly valued in our culture. But in fact the strong sense of competition also tends to encourage the American to be a highly cooperative individual. The reason is that if an individual has a goal he wants to achieve and if he sees that cooperating with a group will help him achieve his goal, he can become very cooperative. Deadlines and the importance of getting things done reinforce the will to cooperate with others (Stewart, 1972).

As with the other cultural values, it can not be assumed that other cultures feel the same way about the benefits of cooperation. For instance, Latin Americans would not compromise their principles in order to cooperate on a task and achieve some group goal (Stewart, 1972). It has been noticed that Saudi students react similarly and will not cooperate on a group problem-solving project if they see the task as one which involves things that are considered negative in their society (using a deck of cards, for example). Many times in the ESL classroom, students are put into groups and are expected to cooperate on a project. Not everyone in the group may dive into the work, define the problem and begin working toward the solution—not because they are unable to or are unwilling to learn, but because the teacher may unknowingly ask them to compromise an important value, be it political, moral, or religious.

All this may make the teacher quite frustrated. It seems that no matter how we structure the lessons, someone will be uncomfortable and unhappy. Our students need to adjust to the types of learning situations they will face when they begin studying at the university. Avoiding certain tasks, whether they be cooperative, competitive, group or individual, will not be helping the students prepare for academic life in our universities in the long run. The best solution is care in choosing a variety of different types of tasks so that at times students will be challenged with unfamiliar and maybe unnerving teaching methods, and at other times students will be dealing with circumstances that are more familiar and reassuring.

In the classroom the teacher may expect to see certain behaviors from her students because of her own cultural values and assumptions, including values instilled in her during her training as a teacher within the American educational system. She may feel that some behaviors will facilitate language learning and other behaviors will not and, therefore, the undesirable behaviors should not be

encouraged in class. Due to the fact that the international students in an ESL classroom have studied in educational systems different from the one in which the ESL teacher was trained, culture conflict might be likely to occur.

VALUED BEHAVIOR IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

Certain behaviors are valued by American teachers for pedagogical reasons. The sections that follow include an explanation of why this might be so and an explanation of why that behavior may not be exhibited by some members of the class.

Independence and individual work.

American teachers value individual work in order to be able to assess each student's progress. If students always work together on assignments and tests, the teacher can not evaluate the skills of individual members of the class. Collaborating during quizzes and tests is considered cheating and is generally forbidden by teachers in classes in the U.S. It is not necessarily unacceptable because it is morally wrong but because it limits the teacher in collecting information about the progress being made by individual class members.

On the other hand, students from some other cultures may have a stronger sense of affiliation to friends than a sense of competition, which is the value that encourages American students to refrain from cheating. Discussions with Moroccan students studying in the U.S. have revealed that students from Morocco feel that duty to friends must come before the desire for individual success, and they consider it socially unacceptable *not* to share information, even on exams. The same value is held by students from Saudi Arabia (Levine, 1982). For this reason, the ESL teacher must be very explicit about the behavior she expects from students during tests and quizzes. Students should be told they are expected to keep their eyes on their own papers and they are not supposed to share information with each other.

Turn-Taking.

The American teacher feels that if she is talking to the class, the students should be quiet and listen to her. In ESL practicum classes, often one concern of a new teacher is how to keep students from talking when the instructor has the floor. The pedagogical basis for this is that when the teacher is talking she is giving important information or explanations; the students will learn best if they are paying attention to her. If they are talking to someone else while she is talking, they obviously are not paying attention and are not absorbing the information.

On the other hand, some of the students in an ESL class may not be accustomed to this practice. Students in Germany are encouraged to talk among themselves even in classes that might be considered best taught through lecture, such

as math and natural science. During a teacher-training session that a group of experienced American teachers were required to take before being allowed to teach in the German schools, one teacher was told not to expect her students to be quiet and listen to her during class (Pines, 1981). A student from Germany and an American ESL teacher could have very different expectations of appropriate behavior during presentations of material by the teacher.

Turn-taking between students and participation in the class is also an important consideration for teachers. In ESL classes the teacher often wants to get information orally from individual class members. In speaking classes, for instance, a teacher needs to hear from all the members of the class in order to evaluate each student's language production. In other cases, during class discussions for example, the teacher wants to give each student a chance to speak so she does not want all the students speaking at once.

In the classroom the teacher can encounter two different types of problems with participation. One problem is that certain students will not participate unless called on directly. These students will not necessarily raise their hands when they have an answer they want to contribute. They may sit still and wait to be called on. It has often been noticed that people from Japan and Korea do not volunteer answers. The other problem with participation is when several students talk at once. In some educational systems in other countries, students are encouraged to be more assertive than students in the U.S. For instance, students from the Middle East sometimes behave in ways which Americans interpret as aggressive (Silverson, 1979). In class it is not uncommon for these students to try to answer every question, seemingly unaware of the value of giving other students a chance to speak.

The teacher would do well to consider how she would manage a class that contains students who may have very different expectations about appropriate ways to participate in class. Some activities that would give quieter students an opportunity to speak should be incorporated into the class. On the other hand, the teacher will need to develop ways to allow the more assertive students to contribute to the class without dominating it or preventing quieter students from participating. One example of how this could be done would be to design a task in which one student needs to speak and one student needs to write. Put students in pairs matching a quiet student with an assertive one and have the quiet student do the speaking and the assertive student do the writing.

Group Work.

In many ESL classes students are asked to work in groups. Teachers value group work for many reasons. Some of the reasons are that it allows students to share information, it decreases students' reliance on the teacher and increases the amount of time each student gets to talk. To encourage communication, group work often involves problem-solving activities.

Some educational systems overseas present material in a lecture format and students are expected to take notes and memorize the information. In some

Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures there is a strong emphasis on memorization and students have difficulty dealing with the creative activities that group work often involves (Silverson, 1979). Making the directions and the goals of group work tasks very explicit may increase the success of these activities by students who are unfamiliar with them.

Deadlines.

Deadlines are very commonly assigned for homework or longer projects in classrooms in the U.S. The value of a due date might be that it gives students motivation to get the project done. In many courses students are asked to write papers which are done independently and require time outside of class. The due date ensures that the teacher receives the paper in time to evaluate it before the course ends.

In countries in which the content of the course is mostly from teacher's lectures, students study their lecture notes, memorize the material, and give it back in relatively the same form on exams. In Morocco students are not usually given homework. If they are, it is not considered very important to complete it and return it. If students have a long-term project to work on, there is a due date but it is considered extendable. Even exam dates are flexible and the students determine by vote when the exams will be held.

The ESL teacher, when assigning homework or long term projects, must be very definite about the day by which she wants the work completed. She should tell students the consequences of not handing in work when it is due, consequences such as a lower grade or possibly no credit for work handed in after the deadline is past.

Asking questions.

Our educational system emphasizes operational thinking based on inductive reasoning which starts with facts and proceeds by means of inferences to test hypotheses. Students are encouraged to learn by doing and it is acceptable for more than the teacher's point of view to be expressed (Grove, 1978). As a result of this perspective students are expected to ask questions during discussions or during lectures that demonstrate that they are trying to follow the material. Those who ask provocative questions are considered good students.

In many other countries, however, the teacher is seen as the keeper of wisdom which is imparted to the students through lectures. Students are not expected to question the teacher. In Portugal, for example, students are treated as if they were ignorant. The teacher has the knowledge students need and students are not expected to be able to contribute anything to the lesson, but rather are expected to sit quietly taking down in their notes the wisdom of the teacher (Grove, 1978). In Saudi Arabia personal opinions are not sought and students are not expected to question what is being taught (Levine, 1982). The ESL teacher who is aware of this difference should never assume everyone understands or agrees just because no one is asking questions. She should build into the lesson a way for

soliciting feed-back from the students to check their comprehension, such as asking questions frequently during a task or giving the students opportunities to participate during the class period.

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF STUDENTS

The ESL teacher teaching several hours a day in a classroom filled with people from many different cultural backgrounds may quickly become aware of the differences in cultural values between herself and her students and begin to understand the special difficulties she will face in teaching students who have different values from her own. The student, on the other hand, immersed in a new culture, is having to deal with difficulties brought on by the differences between his culture and the new one 24 hours a day. In the classroom there are limited opportunities for interaction, the rules and sets of behavior are more circumscribed than in the culture at large. The student has an overwhelming number of possibilities for discovering that his set of value and rules for behavior do not necessarily work in this new environment. The experience the student is going through has been termed "culture shock."

Some researchers see culture shock as a disease in that it has symptoms and an eventual cure, something you "get over" (Oberg, 1979). Another view, one held by Peter Adler, is that culture is a cross-cultural learning experience, it is not something to be avoided like a disease, and it is not something to be gotten over or recovered from as quickly as possible. He claims that two types of learning occur. One is cultural awareness, an understanding that

> *each culture has its own internal coherence and logic. Each culture and its accompanying structures of norms, values, attitudes and beliefs are intertwined fabric and design that has an internal cohesion. No culture, therefore, is inherently better or worse than another, since every culture is its own understandable system. Every culture is acceptable to itself on its own terms, since it works.*
>
> (Adler, 1975)

The second type of learning is an increased self awareness, the realization that "all persons are, to some extent, products of the cultural frame of reference in which they have lived." Every culture provides a sense of identity with regulations on the individual's behavior. And every culture is a frame of reference and orientation for the individual (Adler, 1975). He feels that once an individual realizes that he himself is a cultural being, influenced by his own culture, he will be more accepting of the culturally influenced behaviors, attitudes, and customs of others (Adler, 1975).

There seems to be definite symptoms to culture shock, including negative

feelings toward the hosts, a decline in flexibility and spontaneity, and a refusal to learn the local language, yet there are also benefits to the culture shock experience. The anxiety created by "the accumulated stresses and strains which stem from being forced to meet one's everyday needs . . . in unfamiliar ways" can motivate a person to learn about not only the new culture but, through comparison, his own (Brislin, 1981).

H. Douglas Brown in his article, "The Optimal Distance Model of Second Language Acquisition" (1980), makes finer distinctions in the process of acculturation and feels that there are four stages one passes through when adjusting to a new culture, and culture shock is only one of these stages. The initial stage is one of excitement when everything is new and interesting. The second is culture shock, in which the sojourner feels frustration, anxiety, loss of self-confidence, and alienation due to the fact that familiar cues and supports have been removed. In the third stage, gradual recovery, some of the problems encountered during culture shock are solved but there are still some problems that continue. The final stage is near or full recovery. The sojourner now feels accepting of the new culture, has regained his self-confidence and has made the adaptation necessary to function in his new environment (Brown, 1980).

According to Brown, the third stage of acculturation, gradual recovery, is the stage where most language learning takes place. The anxiety felt by the language learner is no longer so great as to prevent him from acquiring the target language, but since he still encounters problems in dealing with the new culture, the motivation is there to improve the language already acquired (Brown, 1980).

Teachers and administrators in the ESL program at the University of Minnesota have reported that the students who make the least progress in the program tend to be the ones experiencing severe problems in cultural adjustment. For example, one student, after making minimal progress during nine months of full-time English, was enrolled in a seven-week intensive English course during the summer. The last week of the course the student gave a speech comparing family life in Saudi Arabia, his native country, with family life in the United States. He claimed that the divorce rate was high in the U.S. because everyone spent all their time drinking in bars. At the end of his speech he stated that "life in America is next to animal life." His total rejection of American culture indicated that he was in the throes of culture shock and his Michigan test score, as an indication of language acquisition, was the same at the end of the seven weeks as it was at the beginning. This example appears to support Brown's hypothesis that culture shock, or lack of cultural adjustment, can prevent students from acquiring the target language. This illustrates the need for teachers to be concerned about how students are adjusting to the local culture. This implies developing activities that help students to understand and adjust to major cultural differences. This will be discussed further in the next section.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER

In order to know how to help students succeed at acquiring a second language, it is important to know what factors are associated with the *good* language learner. Once the teacher knows what makes a good learner, she can encourage the development of skills that would increase the student's chance of success. Some factors that have been recognized as increasing a student's success in second language acquisition may be outside the influence of a teacher: intelligence, prior bilingualism, and skill in mimicry. One motivating factor the teacher can encourage is the student's curiosity about the new culture (Nida, 1956). Many of the characteristics that are associated with the good learner are ones that indicate that the learner is accepting of and adjusting to the second culture, therefore helping a student adjust culturally should help his language acquisition.

According to John B. Carroll, the most successful language learners are usually ones who look forward to communicating with native speakers of the target language and who expect to find the ideas, experiences, attitudes, and customs of the target language interesting. He further states that people who are outgoing and friendly are more likely to have this enthusiasm than people who tend to be closed-minded and believe that their own way of doing things is the best (Carroll, 1977).

A student's genuine interest in the new culture should increase his motivation in finding out about the new culture, making the student interested in listening, not just speaking. A person with a talkative personality is not necessarily a good learner, since listening to the new language is as important as speaking it. A student who is sensitive to the people of the new culture will not only be interested in what they have to say, but he will also be sensitive to how language is perceived by them, and he will be motivated to correct his grammar and pronunciation because of this sensitivity (Nida, 1956).

For these reasons, ESL classes which are designed to help students become more aware of their new cultural environment and which encourage the students to learn more about the new culture will also facilitate the students' acquisition of the new language. Students who are developing this cultural sensitivity should be less closed-minded since they will have an increased ability to decipher the unfamiliar behavior around them and therefore a better understanding and acceptance of it. The teacher who specifically addresses the issue of culture in the classroom and provides the students an opportunity to discuss these issues is going a long way to increase her students' ease of adjusting.

One important way of improving competence in a second language is through practicing the language at every possible opportunity. Stern states that there are two aspects to learning a language, the formal and the functional (1975). He feels that attention must be paid to each, one at a time. The good learner attends to the formal, but he also searches out every opportunity to put

the language to use. Stern further states that the good learner is willing to use the language in real communication. This information suggests that in order to increase the number of students wanting or willing to use the language functionally, the teacher should raise the students' awareness of the culture around them. The more they understand about the culture, the less mysterious and less threatening it will be. Curiosity may be aroused and certainly confidence in dealing with social situations will increase as understanding of intercultural situations increases.

Another characteristic important to second language learning is risk-taking: not being afraid to make errors. Successful learners make more mistakes than the less successful because they are more willing to try, even when they know they are wrong. One student, considered by many ESL teachers as a very successful learner of English and who also had successfully learned three other foreign languages, claims that he likes to begin speaking his new language as soon as possible, even when in order to express himself he has to use sentences he knows are ungrammatical.

An ESL teacher aware of this fact will try to create an atmosphere in which the student will feel comfortable enough to be willing to make errors. There are many ways this can be accomplished. One way is to avoid correcting every error a student makes. If the student thinks each error will be pointed out, he may avoid speaking unless he knows that his utterance will be error-free. Another way to encourage people to speak more readily is to develop activities in which the student's attention is focused more on the content of what is being said than on the form of how it is being said. Some ways to accomplish this are to use discussion topics that the students find engrossing, or by allowing them to share information that only they have. Talking about their own life experiences and their own cultures could accomplish this, as could designing problem-solving activities in which each student has different information but all the information is necessary to complete the task.

Of course, sometimes the teacher will want to correct the student, but how can this be done in a non-threatening way so as to avoid stifling the willingness of the student to speak? One way that seems to have quite a few benefits is paraphrasing the student's incorrect utterance. In this way the student can hear a correct way of expressing his idea, and other students who may have been aware of the mistake hear the correction and are reassured that they did indeed hear the error and knew the correct form. Another benefit to this type of correction is that the student gets credit for giving the correct response; the content of the answer or statement is not changed in the teacher's paraphrasing of it, only the form.

A good second language learner "cultivates positive attitudes towards the self as a language learner, towards the language and language learning in general, and towards the target language and its society and culture" (Stern, 1983). Helping the student to understand and begin to enjoy his second culture is one way to help him achieve his goal of acquiring a second language.

CONCLUSIONS

One major difference noted in first and second language acquisition is the variation in the degree of proficiency that is attained by learners. It seems that, although normal human beings can learn their first language satisfactorily, there is a great degree of variation in the levels of proficiency that students of second languages attain (Spolsky, 1969). In order to account for this difference many factors must be examined; one of the contributing factors, though, appears to be the attitude of the student toward the speakers of the target language. In fact, a study of international students studying English in the U.S. indicates that this factor has a significant effect on how well the student will learn the new language (Spolsky, 1969). Therefore, helping students deal with the problems that cause culture shock and negative attitudes should improve the students' attitudes and increase the likelihood of their being successful at learning the target language. The ESL teacher aware of this will want to facilitate the rapid cultural adjustment of her international students.

One way to help students learn about the new culture would be to teach about American culture explicitly in the language classroom. But, according to Wilga Rivers (1983), since cultural values were not learned in this way, but rather were learned unconsciously, merely presenting interesting cultural facts will not be enough to enable the student to adjust to or accept the new culture. Rather, she suggests that the teacher and the students investigate and analyze each other's cultures together. In this way students are learning about the values of both cultures and the viewpoints of others as well as their own (Rivers, 1983).

One of the things a student needs to know in order to make a smooth adjustment is *how* things are different. And since the international student spends a great deal of time in classrooms, it would be very beneficial to help the student discover the expectations and values commonly held by American teachers and students.

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